

~~Top Secret~~

POLAND: New Problem With the Church

The government yesterday for the first time sentenced a Roman Catholic priest to three and a half years in prison on the charge of slandering the authorities during a sermon in late December. The authorities also detained another priest, alleging they found a pistol in his residence that was used in the killing of a policeman. Before these developments, the Church and the regime had not pressed minor but potentially controversial issues in the interest of easing tensions.

Comment: The actions against the priests, which follow media attacks on the Church, will raise concern in the Church that some in the regime may be seeking a showdown. This concern could provoke the Church into reacting vigorously, if only to prevent the security services from believing they can with impunity implicate clerics in alleged crimes or opposition to martial law. Tensions would be increased substantially if the regime were to move against priests and bishops who have aided Solidarity's underground activists.

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